



Catherine Grand

French courtesan and noblewoman



CATHERINE GRAND

Catherine Noël de Talleyrand-Périgord (née Worlée; 21 November 1761 – 10 December 1835), was a French courtesan and noblewoman. Born in India the daughter of an officer of the French East India Company, she married George Grand, an officer of the English East India Company. She had a scandalous liaison with Bengal councillor Philip Francis in Calcutta.

She relocated to Paris, where she was known as Madame Grand and became a popular courtesan having relationships with several powerful men. She became the mistress and later the wife of French diplomat Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, the first Prime Minister of France. Catherine was known for her exceptional beauty, which was captured in her 1783 portrait by Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun. She was Princess of Benevent by marriage from 1806 until her death.



CATHERINE GRAND

EARLY LIFE IN INDIA

Family and parentage

Catherine Noël Worlée (also spelled Werlée) was born in Tranquebar, then a town under Danish control in India. She had both French and Danish heritage. Both her parents were French Catholics: her father Pierre Werlée was a French colonial official stationed at nearby Pondicherry, and her mother was Laurence Alleigne, daughter of a colonial armourer. Laurence was Pierre's second wife: in 1744, at the age of 23, he had married Marguerite da Silva, who was aged 14. Marguerite died after having borne him four children, Catherine's half-siblings.



Fort Dansborg, built by the 17th century as seen in 2007; part of the wall is now under the sea.



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At the time of Catherine's birth, her father was held as a prisoner of the Third Carnatic War between France and Britain; Catherine's family had escaped to Tranquebar when Pondicherry was sieged by the British in 1760. After his release the family settled in Chandernagore, a town in French India near Calcutta. She had a basic private education taught to read and write by her mother, but she excelled at art, dance, and etiquette. Her brother, Jean Xavier, was born on 20 September 1766.



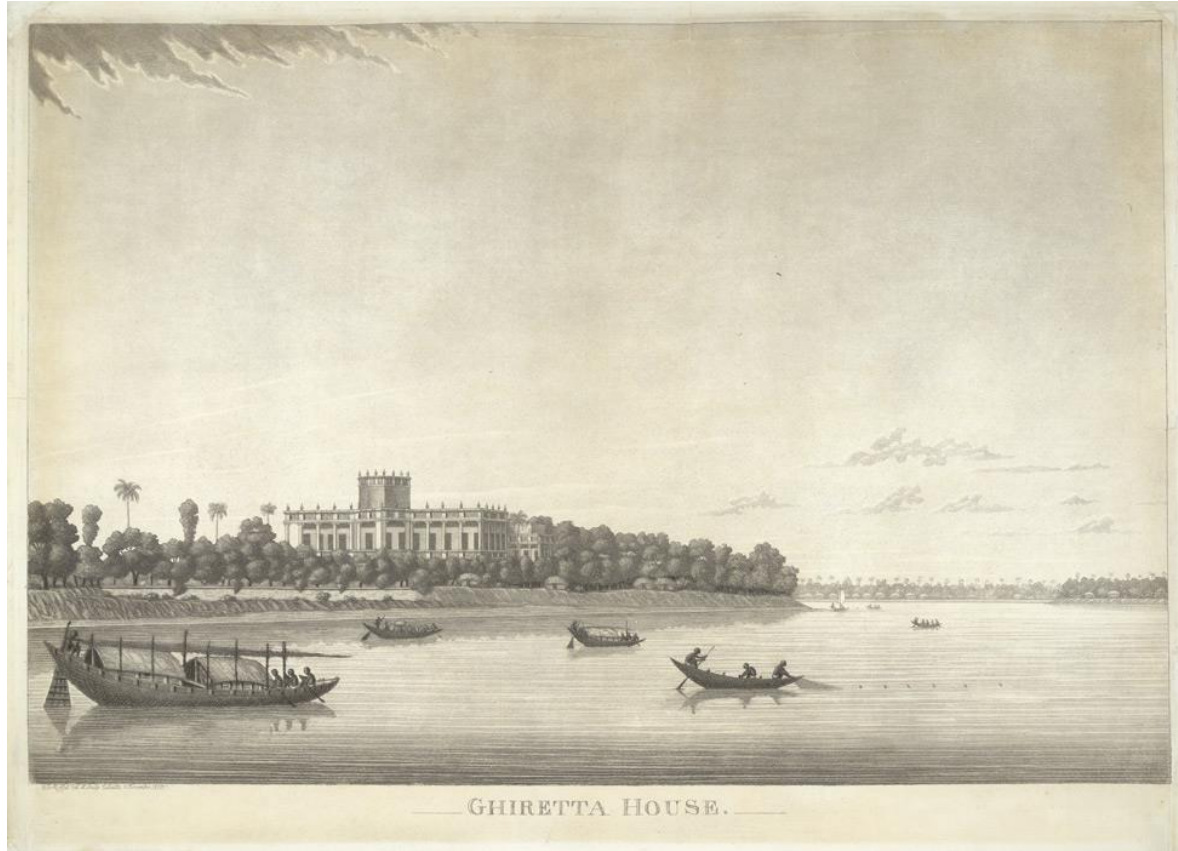
CHANDANNAGAR



Carnatic wars



CATHERINE GRAND



Catherine met her first husband, George Grand, at
Ghiretta House Engraving by James Moffat, Calcutta, 1800

FIRST MARRIAGE

Catherine met George François Grand, an English Company clerk at a ball at Ghiretta House, situated upon the banks of the Hooghly River. Also spelled Ghyretti House, it was considered "one of the finest buildings in India". It served as the country house of the French Governors of Chandernagore.

George Grand was born sometime after 1750, to a Swiss Huguenot merchant family. Grand was a clerk working for the English East India Company of French-Swiss stationed at Calcutta. He was educated in Lausanne and apprenticed in London, before joining a military cadetship in Bengal in 1766.



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Ships of the British East India Company near Fort William in the Port of Calcutta in 1735

He achieved the rank of captain before resigning from military service in March 1773 owing to illness and returned to England. In 1775, Grand obtained a "writership" (a clerkship at the East India Company) and sailed again for India, arriving in Calcutta via Madras in June 1776. His salary was a respectable 1300 rupees. His diary, published in 1814, provides much information about their marriage.

Despite George being nearly twice Catherine's age, they were married in a Catholic ceremony in Chandernagore on 10 July 1777, followed by a Protestant ceremony a few hours later. Exquisitely beautiful and very charming, the new Mrs Grand was well-received by the English ton of Calcutta. The newlyweds took up residence in a house near the neighborhood of Alipore in south Calcutta and seemed to have had a happy first year of married life.



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FIRST AFFAIRS

Mrs Grand caught the attention of British colonial official Philip Francis, member of the Supreme Council of Bengal, who was discovered trying to seduce her at her home on the night of 8 December 1778 by her servants. The scandal caused Catherine's husband to send her back to live with her family in Chandernagore, and successfully sued Francis for adultery, receiving 50,000 rupees in damages on 6 March 1779. Catherine became Francis's mistress soon after.

On 17 August 1780, Francis was seriously injured in a duel with his political rival Warren Hastings and decided to leave India. Francis and Catherine embarked on separate ships in December 1780 – Francis to London and Catherine to Paris to live with her relatives – although they planned to meet later on the Continent.

Once aboard, Catherine began an affair with fellow passenger Thomas Lewin, a colonial official from Madras and later father of Harriet Grote. Their ship was diverted to Cádiz, and the pair arrived together in London by a different ship in the summer of 1781



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LIFE IN EUROPE

In 1782 Mrs Grand and Lewin moved to Paris. Their affair ended amicably soon after, and Lewin settled an annuity on her. She restarted her relationship with Francis, who would rendezvous with her several times in Paris and the resort town of Spa.

Spa is a city and municipality of Wallonia in the province of Liège, Belgium, whose name became an eponym for mineral baths with supposed curative properties.

Since the 18th century, casinos have been located in Spa.



The Casino of Spa



CATHERINE GRAND

Madame Grand, 1783 portrait by Élisabeth Louise Vigée-Le Brun
French artist Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun painted Catherine's portrait in 1783, which was exhibited at the Parisian Salon of the Royal Academy the same year, one of at least ten portraits Le Brun submitted. The oval painting shows Madame Grand holding a musical score. Curators at the Met have compared her pose, and in particular her eyes, to Domenichino's Saint Cecilia (1618). It was favorably received, one of the reviewers remarking on its "volupté enchanteresse" ("bewitching sensuality").

The painting is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York. It has travelled extensively for exhibition, including at the 1939 New York World's Fair, twice at the Grand Palais of Paris, at the Yokohama Museum of Art in 1989, and various other museums around the world.





CATHERINE GRAND

Parisian courtesan

A beautiful blonde, musical and clever, Catherine became a very fashionable courtesan. Catherine served as companion to Claude Antoine de Valdec de Lessart, Édouard Dillon, Louis Monneron, François-Auguste Fauveau de Frénilly and others. In later years, Édouard Colmache would describe thus:

Madame Grand had the kind of beauty which is the rarest and most admired in Europe. She was tall and slight, with that languor in her carriage peculiar to creole ladies; her eyes were well open and affectionate, her features delicate, her golden hair playing in numberless curls, set off a forehead as white as a lily.

Catherine fled to Britain in 1792 during the French Revolution, but returned to Paris in 1797. In 1798 she was arrested on suspicion of being a foreign agent, but was released upon the intervention of French Foreign Minister Charles Maurice de Talleyrand. In a letter to Paul Barras, Talleyrand describes her as "an Indian, very beautiful, very idle, one of the laziest women I have ever known."



Lessart



CATHERINE GRAND



**CATHERINE PAINTED BY
FRANÇOIS GÉRARD BETWEEN
1804 AND 1805, NOW AT THE
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART**

**CATHERINE'S MARRIAGE TO GEORGE
FRANÇOIS GRAND WAS ANNULLED IN 1798
IN ABSENTIA AND SHE BECAME
TALLEYRAND'S MISTRESS IN THE SAME YEAR.**



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Catherine's marriage to George François Grand was annulled in 1798 in absentia and she became Talleyrand's mistress in the same year. The scandal of Talleyrand, a secularized former bishop, living together with his concubine caused Napoleon Bonaparte to issue Talleyrand an ultimatum either marry Catherine or give her up. Concerned that he meant to abandon her, Catherine forced herself into a diplomatic dinner being hosted by Talleyrand and declared their engagement. Talleyrand was too surprised to contradict her. They were married in a quiet ceremony at Neuilly on 9 September 1802; Napoleon and his wife Joséphine signed their marriage contract. After marriage, Catherine's relationship with Talleyrand cooled considerably; however, despite his many infidelities, Talleyrand admired her beauty, her docile nature, and her gracious hosting at their homes at Hôtel de Galliffet and Château de Valençay.





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The marriage did not change Napoleon's contemptuous attitude toward Catherine. At a reception at the Tuileries Palace soon after her marriage, Napoleon is alleged to have remarked, "I hope that the good conduct of citizen Talleyrand will cause the fickleness of Madame Grand to be forgotten." Catherine responded by saying, "In that respect, I cannot do better than to follow the example of citoyenne [Josephine] Bonaparte". The implied rebuke ensured that Catherine was rarely invited to Napoleon's court. Catherine was also disfavoured by Pope Pius VII, who found her background as a courtesan repugnant. He refused to meet her when he attended Napoleon's coronation in 1804, referring to her dismissively as "questa donna" ("this woman").

When Talleyrand was made Prince of Benevento in 1806, Catherine became a princess of Napoleon's First French Empire. In 1808, Napoleon placed the Spanish royal family in the custody of Talleyrand; Catherine was believed to have had a relationship with the Spanish Duke of San Carlos. Catherine was with her husband when they welcomed Tsar Alexander I of Russia to Paris upon Napoleon's downfall in 1814.





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SEPARATION AND DEATH

From the Congress of Vienna in 1815, Talleyrand took the much younger Duchess of Dino as his mistress and Catherine was banished to London. She returned to France in 1817, and settled into a life of quiet luxury from the income she received from Talleyrand and her own ventures. In her later years, Catherine grew obese and vain of her rank of princess. She died in Paris on 10 December 1835, and was buried at Montparnasse Cemetery

